ACLU-04a

Unsent Letter to Dorothy Ehrlich

Regarding the December 15, 1991 ACLU Bill of Rights Day Action

Archival Note: This letter was never sent because Nikki Craft concluded that dealing directly with the American Civil Liberties Union was a waste of her time. Dorothy Ehrlich turned out to be quite a liar.

Editorial Note: This clean transcription makes minor corrections to spelling, punctuation, and obvious typographical errors. The draft mistakenly dated the event December 15, 1992; because the letter itself is dated January 15, 1992 and concerns the December 15, 1991 action, the event date has been corrected to 1991. The ZIP code in the address is reproduced as written.

January 15, 1992
Dorothy Ehrlich
American Civil Liberties Union
1663 Mission Street, Suite 460
San Francisco, California 95741

Dear Ms. Ehrlich,

It has been brought to my attention that you are giving out false information about what happened at our Bill of Rights Celebration at the Westin Hotel on December 15, 1991.

Since you did not witness most of it, maybe you would like to know what actually happened:

There were seven women leafleting in an area where tickets were not required. This included the hallway, the lobby outside the area where the entertainment was held, and the adjacent cocktail rooms.

While we leafleted, we related to the guests politely. Not only because we wanted them to take our leaflets, but because it was fun to watch their response to the "Happy Bill of Rights Day" leaflet. Most people smiled at us when we handed them the leaflet.

We had been leafleting for less than five minutes when several women began walking up to us, grabbing us by the arms and telling us: "You can't leaflet in here! You can't leaflet in here!" This happened to me and other demonstrators. Two of the demonstrators who were assaulted are Dr. Melissa Farley, a clinical psychologist, and Penny Seator, a San Francisco attorney.

We informed them in no uncertain terms that we would continue leafleting. Then they began demanding our tickets. Demanding tickets from demonstrators in areas where others present were not required to produce a ticket is discriminatory enforcement. But discriminatory enforcement is not all. We were being harassed only because we were attempting to make our political statement that the American Civil Liberties Union did not want us to make. "Please don't ruin our celebration," one woman said. "We've been working on it for over a year."

We were careful not to block any area. That happened on one occasion, though, when staff people encircled several of us at an entryway and tried to force us, through intimidation, from an area that we should have been entitled to be in.

We never had any intention of disrupting the ACLU's celebration, and we did not disrupt it. That is, unless your definition of disrupting is peacefully passing out leaflets, and unfortunately that is evidently what some of the civil libertarians thought that night. What a shame: an otherwise nice celebration of the Bill of Rights Anniversary foiled by dissidents leafleting.

What you have been telling the press is cagey and strategic. It misrepresents what actually happened, and I think you know it. You claimed to one reporter that you knew of no vandalism charge. Well, see

the attached citation for vandalism against your staff attorney, Matthew Coles. Here's what happened there: I had presented my ticket and walked into the room where the entertainment was to take place. I was well into the room and was grabbed by Coles on my left side and at least one and possibly two women from behind. One of my witnesses—not one of our demonstrators, but a guest at your event—identified one of the women as Marcia Gallo, the field director there at your office. Coles grabbed me with one hand on my arm and one hand on the framed artwork I was taking in. When I saw he was physically assaulting me and had broken the frame, I angrily pulled away from him and the glass almost fell to the ground. I cut two of my fingers—very minor cuts—from coming in contact with the glass after Coles destroyed the frame.

I said loudly several times for him to get his hands off me, and when people began turning around to look, he and the other women let go of me. After that I began walking around and talking with individual people at the tables. When the entertainment began, I left. I did not disrupt anything, as you have implied to several reporters. Besides, even if your staff honestly thought I was going to disrupt things, they still handled things all wrong. Even if there is a fear of a disruption of a public event, that still does not justify prior restraint.

When I left the auditorium, I had a brief conversation with Matthew. He said that he had a problem with "touching" people, and he said he could understand why I responded the way I did. I said, "Touched? You assaulted me, and I want you to take responsibility for what you did." He then said, "Okay, I assaulted you." If you still have any doubt about what happened between us, then you need to discuss it with him. I believe he might possibly tell the truth if he is not pressured too much by others like Crews to lie, deceive, and play legal technicalities—which is so much the game of ACLU lawyers—rather than pursue real truth, justice, and equity.

You also claimed to the press that the ACLU facilitated our leafleting. That is a low-down dirty lie. The ACLU did not want us leafleting, and they did all they could to get us out of there.

Did you know that lying is a form of censorship? It silences the truth. There is an attempt to distort the truth, and I want it cleared up as soon as possible. As soon as these criminal charges are dealt with, I want a public discourse with Matthew Coles, the women who worked the door that night, and you. I challenge you and the Northern California Chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union to an ethical battle of wits and wit. Is the ACLU up to it?

Very sincerely,

Nikki Craft